



# Affirmation:

## United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

Post Office Box 1021

Evanston, Illinois 60204

BY: .....

### REPORT FROM BALTIMORE

October 1983

This is a special edition of the Affirmation newsletter reporting on our recent national meeting. Look for additional details and more news in a full-length edition to be published in mid-November.

#### National Meeting Gears Up for 1984

With the dominant theme being the upcoming United Methodist General Conference in May 1984, Affirmation met September 16-18 in Baltimore to complete plans for its presence there and to set in motion plans for work beyond that event.

With regard to the General Conference, the meeting spent a good deal of time perfecting a Platform Statement. The statement challenges the UMC for its failure to develop an adequate theological basis for its statements on human sexuality; offers "signposts" for such a theology based on the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience; and suggests specific implications of the more adequate theological stance for the church's thinking about same-gender orientation.

To be released in early November, the Platform will also call for changes in Social Principles Para.'s 71F and 72F, establishment of a General Commission on Homophobia, deletion of Discipline Para. 906.13, additions to Discipline Para. 725 (to include "per-

sons of same sex orientation"), rejection of proposals which would bar Lesbians and gay men from the "representative ministries" of the Church, and renewal of the Ethnic Minority Local Church Missional Priority for the 1985-88 quadrennium. Additionally, Affirmation will be either submitting or co-sponsoring petitions for resolutions on AIDS, Nuclear Disarmament, the dumping of toxic wastes, and access to adequate health care for members of minority communities.

Other plans established at the meeting for the General Conference include a fundraising dinner/celebration honoring those who have been supportive of Lesbians and gay men, a coffeehouse for relaxation and informal interaction with Conference delegates, a resource center/information table for delegates, a network of "covenant groups" to provide support for Affirmation members at the conference, a noontime worship service for delegates and friends of the Conference, and publication of a daily newsletter during the Conference.

Besides General Conference issues, the meeting included workshops brainstorming and planning for "life beyond General Conference." Workshops were held on building support groups, links between Lesbian/gay issues and other social justice issues, developing a gay/Lesbian theology, and appropriating

scriptural backgrounds. Out of these workshops emerged several proposals. One was to hold an annual "summer campmeeting" to allow for theological reflection and nurture within our movement. This would begin during the summer of 1985. A second proposal was to undertake a "Reconciling Church" campaign in which local United Methodist Churches would be asked to state their intention to include Lesbians and gay men without qualification in their congregational life. Thirdly, several comments were made to focus on grass roots network development during the early part of the 1985-88 quadrennium. These were referred to the Coordinating Committee for further discussion and report back at the Spring 1984 meeting.

Discussion was held on the Affirmation meeting travel pool and about the nominations process for leadership beyond May 1984. With regard to the travel pool, it was decided to make more complete information on its operation available in advance of meetings and, when necessary, to appropriate funds from Affirmation's general budget to assist persons who have difficulty participating in the pool. Regarding leadership for the coming year, it was decided that the Coordinating Committee will prepare suggestions at its scheduled February meeting. These will then be shared with a

Nominating Committee which will meet immediately prior to the Spring 1984 Affirmation meeting. The new leadership, which will assume responsibilities after the General Conference, will then be selected at that meeting. Persons interested in being on the Coordinating Committee (or who would like to nominate someone else) should contact either Morris Floyd or Mary Gaddis.

In an important expression of solidarity, Affirmation members approved a strong statement urging the General Board of Global Ministries to agree to nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation for inclusion in its contract with United Auto Workers Union local 65. The UAW local is the bargaining agent for the support staff (secretaries, administrative assistants, etc.) at the Board's New York headquarters. The resolution points out that such a clause is in complete harmony with statements in the UM Social Principles which affirm collective bargaining and which say that gay men and Lesbians are entitled to full protection of their human and civil rights.

#### **Thanks to St. John's UMC and Baltimore Folk**

St. John's UMC in Baltimore's inner city was the host congregation for Affirmation's Baltimore meeting. This justice-oriented congregation is rising out of the ashes of a fire which severely damaged the building to be a witness to the Gospel by helping to create community in its neighborhood. Participants in the September meeting eagerly joined the St. John's congregation for Sunday morning worship and enjoyed coffee and conversation afterward. Affirmation members also appreciated the hospitality

of friends - including many new to Affirmation - who provided housing in Baltimore.

#### **Affirmation Went Ecumenical**

...for its second national meeting in a row. An opening liturgy planned and led by leaders of other gay/lesbian religious groups in Baltimore was a highlight. Speaker at the liturgy was Mel Boozer, a Black gay man who formerly was on the staff of the National Gay Task Force's Washington, D.C. office.

#### **Newsletter to Increase Frequency...**

...to monthly to keep our network informed about events and concerns as they develop in anticipation of General Conference. Readers are reminded that Fall is the time when we ask for your contribution of \$15 or more to keep the newsletter coming your way. Address labels now carry a date indicating one year from your most recent expression of support or interest in Affirmation's work. We don't want to cut off anyone who wants to support our work, so we need to hear from you. It isn't possible to respond individually to all routine communications, but if you want or need a particular piece of information or some other form of support, ask for it and we'll do our best.

#### **Speaking of Support**

The work of Affirmation involves a great deal more than putting out a newsletter. We are working hard to maintain an effective presence with national denominational leadership as well as to create an efficient network for the flow of information and support among our people. Major expenses other than the

newsletter anticipated in the next few months include:

- publication of the Platform Statement for General Conference delegates, the Press, Affirmation members, and others - \$500 or more.
- expenses, including travel for Mary Gaddis and Morris Floyd, for Affirmation's presence at a November national briefing for leaders of General Conference delegations, denominational executives, and the press - at least \$800.
- membership and presence at the Lesbian/Gay Interfaith Alliance - about \$500
- deposit to hold Affirmation members' sleeping and meeting space at General Conference, and other G.C. expenses needed well in advance - \$1,000 or more.
- expenses for a meeting of the Coordinating Committee - about \$1,500.

Need we say more about the importance of your tax-deductible gifts?

#### **Coordinating Committee Membership**

With thanks and regret, Affirmation accepted the resignation of Coordinating Committee member Leanne Tigert, who has decided to seek ordination in the United Church of Christ. Filling the spot vacated by Leanne will be a woman from the Southeast whose name cannot be printed. Readers wishing to communicate with our Southeastern leadership should send their correspondence to the Evanston address for forwarding.

# WITNESS IN GREENSBORO

Ed. Note: In November of 1982, five persons were killed on the streets of Greensboro, N.C. Although there was a video tape recording of the shootings, no one has yet been convicted of any crime. At the General Conference it was proposed that an official delegation be sent to a demonstration protesting the lack of justice. When the General Conference refused to send official representatives, an unofficial group of persons representing the progressive caucuses went to Greensboro to witness for justice. Among those participating were four members of the AFFIRMATION family. The following describes one reaction to the event.

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 "...entering the camp in a state of euphoria, having it fortified by the others I met, all these interesting congenial people...the biggest single mistake the government made was introducing us to each other. We're still in touch! They helped build the pacifist network indeed." -Ray Kepler (W.W.II conscientious objector upon entering a conscientious objector camp)

One of the "mistakes" the 1984 General Conference made was introducing the "Greensboro Marchers for Justice." We are in touch with each other and I think we will be for a long time.

In the debate about sending an official delegation, General Conference members ranted about "objectives and the source (being) so unclear" and questionable support and organization." They worried about "financial backing" and "if it would be embarrassing to us back home." They became obsessed with the Communist Workers Party participation. More than once the conference was informed that sponsors included: "Mr. Lewis Brandon, NAACP member; Rev. Lela Jenkins; Rev. John Moore, who happens to be a United Methodist pastor; and Mr. John Irwin, who is vice-president of the NAACP;...the Racial Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches; Rev. Tyrone Pitts, who is an American Baptist pastor...."

In voting not to send an eight member delegation to the Greensboro March for Justice, conference members spoke about the "regrettable incident" and in its final vote stated "we are disturbed that death resulted with no guilt having been established in the courts." This is how the conference spoke of the racist, anti-labor murder of five community organizers, murders so blatant they were recorded by television.

So...the institution said "no"--and the remnant church said "YES!" The Inter-Ethnic Caucus, AFFIRMATION, Methodist Federation for Social Action, the Women's Caucus and some seminary students said "YES!"--and 28 of us went to Greensboro.

Greensboro touched me in a very deep way, but I didn't know how to say what it was without sounding too sentimental. Then my brain and my heart somehow got poked and it all fit. At the premarch rally, Rev. Lela Jenkins told us that those who work for justice "are doing the Lord's work, and if you don't believe you're still doing the Lord's work." With those words Lela created a community unlike any other I can remember. We were people doing justice. We knew we were different races and organizations and faiths and sexes, but somehow we were one. We were not the Jews invited by the Evangelicals, not Whites standing with Blacks, nor 'gay & straight together." We were all of that and more. There was a oneness about who we were/are.

There's a saying about the total being greater than the sum of its parts. And that's how Greensboro was. Whole! We knew we were all the parts & it was exciting to be whole.

"If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad...All of you together are the one (...and each one of you is a separate and necessary part).-I Corinthians 12:26-27. The "part" stuff, even the "all parts" is somehow easy for me to claim. Greensboro pushed me to claim/re-member oneness/wholeness.

P.S. At its most recent annual conference North Georgia adopted a resolution "to condemn the KKK and provide training to help United Methodists deal with KKK rallies in their communities."

And, two kittens were born at my home on 5 May, two healthy boys named Yhley\* and Greensboro. -Mary Gaddis

\*For translation meet me in Denver.



## BOOK REVIEW

Robin Scroggs, The New Testament and Homosexuality  
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 158 pp.

### A MUCH NEEDED AID

In recent years, many books have been published on the topic of homosexuality and the Christian faith. Most have been fairly general and end up quoting either each other or the two or three important sources like John Boswell's, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, or John McNeill's, The Church and the Homosexual. A 1983 addition to that literature has gone unnoticed.

In The New Testament and Homosexuality, noted New Testament scholar Robin Scroggs carefully reviews the New Testament era background to homosexuality. Scroggs approaches the current debate within the Church on this issue as a biblical scholar and not as an ethicist. He began this task after being totally frustrated in debates in which the Bible was "inappropriately" invoked for either one side or the other.

Scroggs begins with a review of the first basic principle of biblical interpretation: the need to understand the historical, cultural and linguistic milieu of any biblical passage before discussing its meanings.

Then Scroggs painstakingly uncovers the historical backgrounds of the all too familiar passages used to justify religious oppression of lesbians and gay men. He examines the underlying male sexist biases of the period, the role pederasty played in homosexual expression within the Greco-Roman Hellenistic culture of the New Testament period, and the reactions of first and second century A.D. Jews and Christians to that expression. This analysis makes it clear that homosexuality was understood much differently then than it is now. This conclusion is the cornerstone of Scroggs's argument in the final chapter.

"The basic model in today's Christian homosexual community is so different from the model attacked by the New Testament that the criterion of similarity of context is not met," Scroggs concludes. "Biblical judgements against homosexuality are not relevant to today's debate... [This is] not because the Bible is not authoritative, but simply because it does not address the issues involved."

Scroggs's book is an important work. It helps us to understand the scriptures of early Christianity and why they say what they say. It also pushes us to focus on the real issue of our time: What is to be the Church's response to lesbians and gay men in the church, given the new understandings we have of human sexuality.

This is also a very well written book. Unlike other works previously published on the topic, it is brief and easily read by laypeople. For those also interested, Scroggs includes relevant scholastic and original source data in footnotes throughout the book.

This book is a must for anyone who wishes to participate in an intelligent way in the current debates. It is a tragedy that the General Conference voted the prevailing cultural prejudices on this subject without paying attention to the important new Biblical scholarship. For those ready to take a next step, I highly recommend this work. -John Hannay

Another version of this review appeared in The Washington Blade, Washington, D.C.

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Have you been wondering what the four number code on the right hand side of the mailing label means? It indicates the month and year for your membership renewal! If the number is 0000, we haven't heard from you in at least a year and need an indication of your desire to remain a member and continue receiving this newsletter.

The basic rate is \$15 per person. At this level you will receive the newsletter by bulk mail. If you need to receive the newsletter by first class mail in a plain envelope the rate is \$20.

Additionally, Affirmation is dependant on contributions to facilitate its ongoing ministry. Newsletter production, mailing costs, advertising, phone calls for task force meetings, travel for Coordinating Committee meetings, etc. all are paid for through the generosity of your contributions. Won't you pledge a small amount each month and support the work of Affirmation?

Your tax-deductible contribution should be mailed to: AFFIRMATION, [REDACTED]  
Evanston, IL [REDACTED]. Please make your check payable to "NATIONAL AFFIRMATION."

## UPDATE - THE RECONCILING CONGREGATION PROGRAM

The Reconciling Congregation Program announces the first Reconciling Congregation: Washington Square United Methodist Church in New York City. Washington Square Church has a rich tradition of solidarity with gay men and lesbians. We welcome this historic church to the Reconciling Congregation Program. Other pioneer Reconciling Congregations include Wesley United Methodist Church in Fresno, California and Saint Paul United Methodist Church in Denver, Colorado.

The Reconciling Congregation Program weekly receives inquiries from local churches seeking information about the program. Coordinators for the program are compiling a packet which gives an overview of the program and suggestions for how a local church may become a Reconciling Congregation.

Future plans for the program include the development of educational resources for the local church. Study materials, educational events, bibliographies, etc. will be needed for this resource bank. (If you have participated in or know of similar resources, your input is welcome.)

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Within the next year, the program will begin a publication for Reconciling Congregations. This quarterly publication may include education, study, liturgical, and action suggestions for local churches. It will provide support and a method of communication for those reconciling presences wherever they are.

By Fall, there will be several more Reconciling Congregations. These new congregations will be announced in future newsletters. Watch for more updates on the Reconciling Congregation Program. For more information contact Reconciling Congregation Program, [REDACTED] Nashville, TN [REDACTED].

**AFFIRMATION** celebrates one sign of the Gospel breaking through in the Western Jurisdiction. Meeting at Boise, Idaho, the Jurisdiction selected three new Bishops; Roy Sano, an Asian; Elias Galvan, a Hispanic; and Leontine Kelly, a black woman. Four of the Jurisdiction's six episcopal areas will be headed by a person of color. We rejoice in this expression of inclusiveness by delegates to the Western Jurisdictional Conference.

## INTERNAL/EXTERNAL MINISTRY TASK FORCES SET UP IN BALTIMORE

How to expand AFFIRMATION's ministry in the coming years was a major focus of the Spring meeting in Baltimore. Using our consensual style of decision making, we divided our work between two major task forces--Internal Ministry and External Ministry

The task forces reflect the traditionally dual nature of our work--caring for ourselves (that is, primarily, lesbians and gay men from the United Methodist tradition) and reaching out to others (the United Methodist denomination, local congregations, other lesbian/gay organizations, groups involved in social-justice issues).

The Internal Ministry Task Force selected three goals for the near future. Most important, the task force will set up a regional organizing network so that AFFIRMATION can provide support and fellowship to lesbian/gay United Methodists in all parts of the United States. Regional organizers will be named at the Denver meeting for the several sections of the country. Their responsibilities will include: being a resource person and adviser, facilitating the development of local community networks, initiating regional gatherings, and assisting in the communications work of Affirmation.

The two other major goals of this task force are continuing AFFIRMATION's work on "doing theology" (this will be a primary focus of our September meeting in Denver) and planning Campmeeting '85, which was discussed in the June newsletter.

Five major concerns were selected for the External Ministry Task Force. The first is expanding our Reconciling Congregation program (see article elsewhere). The task force also will continue on work to confront homophobia in the UMC, strive to expand our outreach and improve our name recognition, continue our membership in the national Lesbian and Gay Interfaith Alliance, and help enable us to be supportive of persons involved with other social-justice issues.

Members were selected from the two task forces to serve on separate, small communications and fund-raising task forces.

## FORMING A LOCAL AFFIRMATION GROUP

Requests have come recently from several areas for information about how to form a local AFFIRMATION group. Since AFFIRMATION does not officially charter chapters, its local groups have a range of styles and formats. Following are the stories of how two groups formed. We are inviting other established local groups to share their stories for future newsletters.

When a local group forms it is helpful to communicate the names of contact persons to AFFIRMATION national spokespersons. This makes it possible to refer interested persons to your group. And, of course, it is also helpful if local group members support the national organization by subscribing to the newsletter. Frequently we are asked how many AFFIRMATION members there are. -Ed.

### NASHVILLE AFFIRMATION

The Nashville AFFIRMATION group formed as a result of the organizing necessary to host a National AFFIRMATION meeting in the Spring of 1982. A small group of local people arranged food and housing for the AFFIRMATION people who came for the meeting.

Following the meeting, we met to brainstorm the names of other United Methodist gay men and lesbians in the area.

A faithful 10-15 men and women attend monthly pot-lucks in the homes of individual members. The group has remained about one-half male and one-half female throughout the three year history. Although the focus of the group is primarily support and community, we have invited a variety of speakers and hosted a national event on gay/lesbian theology.

Nashville AFFIRMATION has become a community leader in events such as Lesbian/Gay Pride Week and interfaith liturgical events (including a gay/lesbian Seder service).

The strength of the group is based on--the balance of men and women, the unique opportunity for support that it offers to gay men and lesbians of Music City, and good cooking!

-A lesbian whose name cannot be used

### MID-ATLANTIC AFFIRMATION

The first talk of forming a local AFFIRMATION group in the Washington, D.C. area occurred in early 1979 when Michael Collins and Dick Cash were visiting John Hannay, Ron Gebhardt-sbauer, and myself in our townhouse here. At that time, Michael was one of two co-coordinators of National AFFIRMATION.

Our first local meeting, it was decided, would be held in May of that year when Michael, Dick, and the other National co-coordinator, Peggy Harmon, were scheduled to be in the area for a national conference on homophobia. A reception was planned for interested persons to meet Michael and Peggy, who would discuss with us what AFFIRMATION was and did.

We spread the word to interested persons in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia by a mailing to local persons on the National AFFIRMATION mailing list. We also put an announcement and listed our phone number in the local gay/lesbian newspaper, the Washington Blade. Word-of-mouth personal contacts helped too. We scheduled an all-afternoon planning session a month later and appointed a few persons to organize it.

At the follow-up meeting a local pastor/college instructor led a discussion of "Alternative Lifestyles in a Christian Context." Recreation time also was set aside. Once again, a mailing, the Blade, and word-of-mouth were used to let people know about the meeting.

About a dozen gay men showed up at that meeting. We decided to meet two Sundays a month, blending worship, program, and recreation. A steering committee was formed to plan future meetings. We also decided to try to function as a regional, rather than exclusively local, group (hence our name, Mid-Atlantic AFFIRMATION) and to attempt to work with both the Baltimore and Virginia annual conferences.

During our first year, we continued our efforts to establish a presence in the regional lesbian/gay community. Of special importance were a party held at Virginia Beach in southern Virginia to attract gay men and lesbians in that area and a fundraising reception with Michael Collins and Joan Clark shortly after Joan was fired by the Women's Division of the UMC Board of Global Ministries.

MID-ATLANTIC cont. on page 7